

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

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## THESIS

### DETERMINANTS OF U.S. SECURITY POLICY IN BULGARIA

by

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June 1999

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**DETERMINANTS OF U.S. SECURITY POLICY IN BULGARIA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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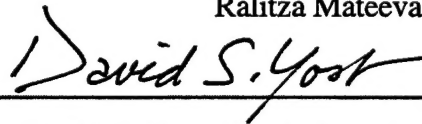
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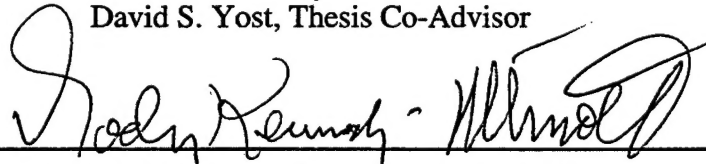


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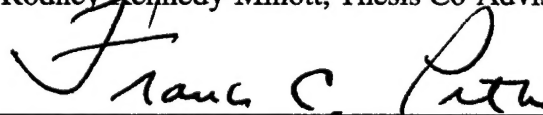
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## ABSTRACT

The end of the Cold War era of bipolarity has raised many important questions concerning the role of the United States in the Balkans. The United States and its NATO allies have made various commitments regarding the security challenges that have arisen in that region since the early 1990's. The United States declared its support for political and economic reform in Bulgaria and committed its attention and resources to promote Sofia's engagement in Western security institutions. The main U.S. interest in the Balkans, including in Bulgaria, is to maintain the region's stability and security, so that conflicts there do not affect U.S. interests in Western Europe and the Middle East. America's security interests in the Balkans stem from the new role it plays as a major guardian of international order and from the objectives flowing from this role - promoting democracy and free-market economic systems. It is therefore in the interests of the United States to support political and economic reform in post-communist Bulgaria.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War era of bipolarity has raised many important questions concerning the future role of the United States and Russia in the Balkans. Between 1944 and 1989, the Balkan region was seen as a strategic pawn in the East-West political struggle for influence between the two superpowers. With the end of the Cold War both Russia and NATO appeared to lose interest in the Balkans. This period of strategic disengagement, however, came to an end with the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

The United States and its NATO allies have made various commitments regarding the security challenges that have arisen since the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990's. This breakup created grave security problems in the Balkan region, and challenged security and stability throughout the European continent and the Middle East as well. Russia's traditional interests concerning the Balkans were placed in question, and Moscow expressed its concern regarding these events. America's security interests in the region stem from the new role it plays as a major guarantor of international order and from the objectives flowing from this role – promoting democracy and free-market economic systems. This is why it has been in the interests of the United States to see post-communist Bulgaria engaged in the process of becoming a liberal democracy. The United States declared its support for political and

economic reform in Bulgaria and committed attention and resources to promote Sofia's engagement in Western security institutions.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 introduced Bulgaria to a completely new phase in its historical experience and political orientation. During the period 1944-1989, Bulgaria's communist elite developed the impression that Bulgaria was the USSR's closest ally, at least in comparison with the rest of the Warsaw Pact countries. The traditional gratitude that the Bulgarian people had towards the Russian "big brother," inspired by Moscow's role in the nation's liberation after over 500 years under the Ottoman yoke, became ambivalent after 50 years of dependence within the Soviet sphere of influence.

Until 1989, U.S. policy towards Bulgaria derived from the fact that Bulgaria was a state within the communist camp and its territory formed part of the southeastern flank of the Warsaw Pact. U.S. security policy reflected these realities and concentrated on being prepared to defend Greece and Turkey, as NATO allies, in case of tensions or war in the region. However, United States security relations with Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989 could be described as based on ideological and power considerations (as a reflection of the fact that Bulgaria was a communist state allied to the USSR) rather than being determined by more traditional state-to-state interactions and economic connections (such as commerce).

In Bulgaria, after the democratic change in November 1989, official policy increasingly supported cultivating a diplomatic and security relationship with the United States. During the early general elections in April 1997, a second generation of reformers came to power with the goal of making up for lost time and sent a clear message to American political decision-makers: there was a will and an opportunity to develop closer relations between the two countries. The Bulgarian government was facing the challenge of finding an answer to the question, "How can Bulgaria deepen its security cooperation with the United States?" Furthermore, it became important for Bulgaria to establish means to occupy a special place on the U.S. security agenda in the region.

However, while answering these questions, Bulgaria had to determine the areas of convergence in Bulgarian and U.S. security policy objectives. The Balkans have traditionally been synonymous with conflict and instability. Contemporary U.S. security policy has been more interested in dealing with immediate political-military crises than providing long-term investment in security and stability. Security is a key word on the current U.S. foreign policy agenda. This means, on the one hand, investment in security assets (including military forces), and on the other hand, security for investments (stable and predictable economic and political relations).

The dynamic process of creating new security relations between the United States and Bulgaria should be assessed, especially in the context of the

current crises in the Balkans, on two levels: first, addressing the current security challenges, and second, drawing a picture of the underlying long-term conditions for effective partnership and alliance.

The short-term security interactions between the United States and Bulgaria are focused on bringing about a successful settlement of the Kosovo crisis. Bulgaria plays an important role with its support for the U.S. and NATO security agenda for the region. The new "Marshall" plan for the Balkans is still on the drawing board; the United States and its allies are still determining their priorities for this plan's execution. Consequently, these political and economic steps for rebuilding the region require the active participation of the West Europeans within the institutional framework of the European Union (EU). Most political analysts agree that the United States will support an active and effective EU policy for reconstruction and development in the Balkans. This does not exclude the leading role of the United States. On the contrary, its role should be significant but still not too "overbearing," mainly because of America's lack of tradition in understanding the way in which Europeans solve ethnic and minority problems. The United States has a tradition of supporting the rights of ethnic minorities on the basis of protecting individual rights. This stems from the history and civic traditions of the United States. In contrast, Western Europe, including the European Union, has accumulated more experience in the legal protection of collective minority rights. This does not eliminate the tensions

between ethnic groups, but it at least gives hope and facilitates solving some of the problems in the Balkans. Bulgaria is a good example of a stable transitional democracy with a diverse ethnic map. It is in the interests of the United States to promote and support the success of the reforms in Bulgaria, so that it will become an advanced democracy.

The long-term implications for United States foreign policy towards Bulgaria will be significantly dependent on domestic conditions in both countries. The U.S. Presidential election in 2000 and subsequent changes in the executive establishment will probably result in some change in foreign policy approaches, but not in America's general attitude.

What type of political and economic structure Bulgaria will have in the future is in a sense an even more significant question. If the reforms continue as anticipated, it is quite possible that Bulgaria will become an important partner and potential ally of the United States in Western security institutions. The extensive relations with the United States in the future will stem from successful improvement in economic well-being, liberal political institutions, and the transformation of the professional military, so that it is capable of meeting the security challenges of the new millennium.

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- ◆ What are the current factors determining U.S. security policy towards Bulgaria? To what extent is U.S. policy towards Bulgaria influenced

by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and why is this significant for both states?

- ◆ To what extent does successful democratization of the political, economic and security sectors of Bulgaria's public institutions influence U. S. policy towards Bulgaria?

More important from a Bulgarian perspective is the U.S. support for the economic and institutional reforms now taking place in Bulgaria, because of the difficult character of the transformational processes. The more focussed and engaged the policy the United States pursues towards Bulgaria, the more valuable it is, because of the impact it could have in helping to avoid destabilizing errors in domestic policy. American leaders have understood the importance of such a clear engagement, and since February 1998 the United States has pursued a determined and engaged policy towards Bulgaria.

The broad traditional definition of the term "security," used in this study, allows a broad analysis and interpretation of the current security challenges in the Southeast European region. The current events in the Balkans could not support extensive academic interpretations, because most of the events have been too immediate to permit detached analysis. Since the beginning of the NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia in March 1999, the political, diplomatic and security efforts of the US government have extended to preventing the conflict's spillover into the so-called "front-line states." This study does not speculate about possible scenarios for the near future. It concentrates on deepening

understanding of the past and the present, and therefore suggests some ideas about the future relationship between the United States and Bulgaria in the security arena as a direct result of the unfolding events in the former Yugoslavia. Understanding each other's security interests and associated political-military trends will allow better communication and promote mutual gains in cooperation.

The thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter II examines the history of the U.S.-Bulgarian relationship prior to 1989, by analyzing the period prior to 1944 and the Cold War period.

Chapter III discusses the current security relationship between the United States and Bulgaria, and explains the common bond of the interests and policy determinants of the two states.

Chapter IV analyses U.S.-Bulgarian security relations before and since 1989 by comparing and contrasting these relations during these historical periods. This chapter also assesses the prospects for future U.S.-Bulgarian security relations.

The conclusion suggests some possible ways to improve security cooperation between the United States and Bulgaria. It considers the prospects for peace and stability in the Balkans, advocates the success of the liberal democratic and free market reforms underway in Bulgaria, and describes the

significant role of the United States in promoting such an outcome as consistent with America's vital interests.



## II. U.S. - BULGARIAN RELATIONS PRIOR TO 1989

*The dogmas of the quiet past, are  
inadequate to the stormy present.*

Abraham Lincoln

### A. PRIOR TO THE COLD WAR

Through a large part of its history Bulgaria was a victim of its strategic importance. For the Ottoman Empire it was the gateway to the Balkans and Europe. For nearly five hundred years it was a Turkish province, powerfully subjected to the Ottoman domination even more than the rest of the Southeast European possessions of Istanbul. For Russia, since the end of the nineteenth century, Bulgaria has served as a base for its policy in the Balkans. Russia has sought free passage through the Turkish Straits, and has tried to influence Turkish domestic affairs.

American trading vessels conducted business in the eastern Mediterranean as far back as 1785. The first American official to visit this part of the world was Captain William Bainbridge, who arrived in Istanbul on the ship *George Washington* in 1800. This visit was mainly inspired by a U.S. wish to counter the British imperial objectives in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

According to an American diplomatic historian,

An American consul was formally recognized in Smyrna (1824), but several more years passed before successive diplomatic missions finally culminated in the ratification (1831) of the first treaty.<sup>1</sup>

Bulgaria was a northern province of the Ottoman Empire at that time, but the established arrangements for commerce permitted American merchant ships in the Black Sea, and it is quite probable that some of them conducted trade with people living in what is now Bulgaria. The dramatic events of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the efforts of the Concert of Europe to prevent it were of little importance for U.S. policy in Europe. The so-called "Eastern Question" was not significant for United States policy, because Washington did not seek Turkish territory, unlike major European powers.<sup>2</sup> Bulgaria became an independent state in 1878, and the United States established standard diplomatic relations in 1908. These were not of any exceptional significance until the outbreak of the First World War.

The limited American involvement in Bulgaria in the late nineteenth century and during the early twentieth century can be explained by the general isolationist approach towards European affairs, and the lack of U.S. economic and political interests in that part of the world. America's commitments in

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<sup>1</sup> Bemis, Samuel Flagg, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, fifth edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, September, 1965, p.340.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., .341.

World War I did not involve what Churchill called Europe's "soft underbelly." Washington kept a close eye on the process of creating a new system of balanced relations between the major European states. After World War I, on November 27, 1919, the United States and Bulgaria signed the Treaty of Neuilly. Sofia was obliged to accept this treaty because of Bulgaria's having been an ally of the Kaiser's Germany.

According to a prominent U.S. diplomatic historian, little significance should be attached to America's signature to this treaty, which was prepared by the European victors in the conflict:

The Bulgarian treaty, settling the present boundaries of the Balkan state, and fixing a staggering total of reparations for that small country, does not concern American diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

Some American analysts nonetheless understood how important the strategic role of Bulgaria was, owing in part to the traditional historical influence which Russia exerted in the Balkans. This later became an important consideration for the U.S. leadership in developing policies in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Prior to World War II the United States had formal diplomatic and commercial relations with Bulgaria, but their nature was mainly determined by the place which Bulgaria held in the national interests of Russia (and later, the

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<sup>3</sup> Bemis, Samuel Flagg, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, fifth edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, September, 1965, p.340

Soviet Union), Turkey, Germany, France and Great Britain. To state that Bulgaria as an independent state from 1878 to 1939 played a role on the United States security agenda would be historically true, but an overstatement of the facts in that Sofia's role was minor in American eyes.

The history of American foreign policy towards Bulgaria during World War II is marked by the identification of the basic American political goals while taking into consideration the interests of the other leading Allies against the Axis – Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

Another important factor encouraged the United States to adopt a careful approach to Bulgaria. In spite of the traditional gratitude that the Bulgarian people had towards Russia because of its role in the late nineteenth-century liberation from over 500 years under the Ottoman yoke, Sofia entered both World Wars on the side of Germany. The reasons for these historical choices included hopes of regaining territories that had ethnic Bulgarian populations and that traditionally were considered a part of Bulgaria (Macedonia, Thrace, and Dobrudga). Another important factor which determined the pro-German orientation in both World Wars was the Habsburg kinship of the Bulgarian royal family. However, in Bulgarian political life until 1946 there were traditionally strong political parties and non-governmental organizations with influence in Bulgarian society which had a pro-Western orientation.

That fact was taken into account by American decision-makers during the 1940's, when thinking about an alternative future for postwar Bulgaria. These plans were significantly different from the ones drawn up by the Soviet Union for invading the southern Balkans.

On the eve of World War II, Bulgaria was often considered to be a key to the Balkans. Because of its defeat in 1918 as an ally of Germany, it had a very difficult time in the interwar period, which was marked by military coups, political assassinations, and a foreign policy and foreign trade pattern dependent on Great Power politics. When the Nazis began to take over in Europe in 1939, King Boris tried to avoid direct involvement in the hostilities of either bloc. In 1940, it became clear that this policy was ineffective, and Bulgaria was expected to take sides in the rivalry. Some Great Powers were eager to offer a deal to the Bulgarian political leadership, basically tempted by the country's strategic location and its large and well-respected army. One of these great powers was the United States.

According to an American historian,

To a large degree, American involvement in Bulgaria was fortuitous, the result of accidental opportunities in combination with an abiding desire among both military and civilian planners to expand American influence wherever a possibility might present itself.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Boll, Michael M. *Cold War in the Balkans: American Foreign Policy and the Emergence of Communist Bulgaria, 1943-1947*, The University Press of Kentucky, 1984, p.2.

The first American attempt to pursue Bulgarian involvement on the side of the Allies came as a result of a specific request from London. Great Britain feared a German invasion of Greece, and was concerned about the victorious march of the Axis Pact in Europe. In January 1941 President Roosevelt responded to the British request. He sent the future Chief of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), Bill Donovan, on a series of meetings with leaders of some Balkan countries, so that he could promise them assistance in case of resistance against the German expansion. However, this "gentle persuasion"<sup>5</sup> did not bring the desired success. In a meeting with King Boris, Donovan was informed that Bulgaria had already made its choice. The OSS Chief's journey to Sofia was not completely useless, however. When the developments of the war showed the Bulgarian political elite that they had bet on a losing horse in 1941, they remembered the fact that actually the door was never closed to Bulgaria as a potential Allied partner. Donovan confided to the British Ambassador that the King was "an honest if confused idealist who sincerely wished to avoid bringing Bulgaria to the German side."<sup>6</sup>

Pressed by its commitments to Berlin, Bulgaria declared war on the United States and Great Britain following the events of Pearl Harbor.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.2

Washington was clearly aware of the reasons for this Bulgarian choice, and delayed its own declaration of war until June 1942. Throughout the whole of 1942, both Bulgaria and the United States were preoccupied with their own involvement in World War II.

In the spring of 1943, when Washington and London started considering opening a second front in Europe, Bulgaria was back in the diplomatic scene as a player worthy of attention. King Boris, anticipating the future development of events, was trying to find the best possible way out of the Axis, or at least the way that would be least catastrophic for Bulgaria and its territorial integrity.

According to Michael M. Boll, from 1943 on there was an Allied operation underway for invading the southern Balkans; it was led by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the State Department, and the British Secret Service. The American plan was to align Bulgaria with the West. Thus it was a covert action, financed and controlled by two democratic states, yet also coordinated with the Soviet NKVD. This plan was anticipated to be reasonable and gained the support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The plan envisaged Bulgaria's participation in the war against Nazi Germany and its further reintegration with the democratic states.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-29

The main point of the plan was to expand the threat to the Axis without committing additional manpower and resources from the joint allied effort, because the main focus was still on the invasion of Europe. This idea of using local forces in the Balkans was from the very beginning a failure. British postwar planning for Eastern Europe clearly called for groups of states based upon regional confederations. However, in August 1943, the Soviet Ambassador to London made it clear that the Soviet Union would object to any postwar confederations in Southeast Europe.<sup>8</sup> That warning led Great Britain to decline to accept any responsibility for Bulgaria's future after the war. America was left on its own in implementing the OSS plan for the Balkans.

Unfortunately, a couple of factors prevented the pursuit of that plan, most of which were determined by the fast development of the war.

The shifting fortunes of war, the reluctance of the wartime Bulgarian cabinet to desert Hitler in the face of the German occupation of Hungary, and the unexpectedly rapid advance of the Soviet armies through Romania in the summer of 1944, however, converted Bulgaria into a test case for post-war U.S.-Soviet accommodation in the Balkans.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. , p.15

<sup>9</sup>Boll, Michael M. *Cold War in the Balkans: American Foreign Policy and the Emergence of Communist Bulgaria, 1943-1947* The University Press of Kentucky, 1984, p.3



America's central goal in Bulgaria before its surrender was the creation of a democratic government, which would bring the country back to the mainstream of postwar international life. The determinants of America's security interests were creating a pro-Western posture in the Balkans, which was expected to promote economic welfare and political security.

Nevertheless, at the end of August 1944, the fate of Bulgaria was almost predetermined by the fact of the Red Army's southwestern advance and arrival at the river Danube. However, the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party in exile in Moscow transmitted Stalin's "recommendation" to the anti-fascist resistance that the matter of a socialist revolution should not be raised at that time. The subjects of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and the socialist revolution were missing from the propaganda materials; the key tasks were fighting Nazi Germany and its Bulgarian "stooges" and forming a broad national anti-fascist front.

The first Fatherland Front government, headed by Kimion Georgiev, proclaimed the victory of the left-wing coalition on Radio Sofia on 9 September 1944. Composed of members of the Zveno Political Group, Communists, Agrarians, Social Democrats and independents, the political configuration that took over the helm in Bulgaria did not catch the Soviet Union's Western Allies unprepared and unaware. In spite of the restrictive measures, the US emissary in Bulgaria managed to obtain the necessary information on the chances of the

pro-Western party leaders in the Fatherland Front. The US official representatives in Sofia helped and encouraged their supporters, hoping to avoid the establishment of a left-wing, totalitarian regime. By the end of the war, however, the radicalization of the political situation in Bulgaria had assumed proportions that alarmed the US administration.

American foreign policy concerning Bulgaria in the post-World War II period was influenced by a feeling of moral obligation towards the pro-democratic circles in Bulgarian society. After the fall 1945 elections in Bulgaria, the Soviet determination regarding the socialist future of Bulgaria became clear. The confidence with which the Communist Party won the elections and established control over the whole political spectrum by purging the members of the opposition was quite striking. There is much evidence that these events would have been somewhat different if the Red Army had not maintained occupation forces in Bulgaria.

The decision to maintain diplomatic and political pressure on Bulgaria, even when it was clear that a pro-Western orientation was inconceivable, may have been dictated by the hope of the American leadership for a possible opportunity for Bulgarian society itself to overcome its preoccupation with fear, owing to the Soviet terror. However, such events were not expected to be inspired through American involvement, because American-Soviet relations could not be held hostage solely to events in a small Balkan land, no matter how

important the moral and political commitment. When the prospects of reform in Bulgaria and of an improvement in East-West relations waned in 1946, the U.S. government wisely decided to concentrate its limited resources on containing Soviet expansion in areas not occupied by the Red Army. In 1947, in spite of the oppression of the Bulgarian opposition and the bloody purges, the United States pragmatically established relations with Sofia, hoping to retain some influence in that country.

Some of the arguments defending the American diplomatic and political elite for their "non-policy" approach refer to the lack of specific assets in the region. However, the "loss" of Bulgaria was not a result of a lack of interest or effort but stemmed from a well-reasoned calculation of the American strategic interests and capabilities in Europe. There were no troops on the ground able to enforce American policy decisions. Moreover, there is a reasonable explanation for the concentration of U.S. military commitments in Germany, Italy and elsewhere in Western Europe in preference to the Balkans, and this decision was consistent with the strategic objectives and available assets, as well as domestic American politics.

In 1943 and 1944, Moscow's intentions were unclear regarding Bulgaria's future. After the failure of the OSS plan it was still not clear what the Soviet intentions were. The preoccupation with the military objectives of the war and the lack of a strong and influential ally in Bulgarian political life made the Soviet

strategic and political aims probable but not certain. It is quite difficult to determine when the strategic preoccupations prevailed over the tactical military objectives. There is some strong evidence that this moment might have been during the 1945 London Peace Conference. The fates of Bulgaria and Romania were decided by the perception of a compromise for weightier strategic commitments – Germany and Japan. Moscow found the best place and moment, even though it meant violating the agreements concluded at the Yalta Conference, to establish its control over much of the Balkan Peninsula. The best way to do so was by holding immediate elections, which brought to power Communist governments in both Bulgaria and Romania.

American security policy in Bulgaria at the beginning of the Cold War often involved shifting tactics, designed to secure unchanging security objectives. If America's commitment to Bulgaria had not been taken hostage to larger interests (namely Japan and Germany) during the relatively fluid period of East-West relations immediately after the war, a democratic future for Bulgaria might have been possible. The shifting fortunes of war and the rapid advance of the Red Army in the summer of 1944 made Soviet pre-eminence in the Balkans inevitable. The American expectations were that the Bulgarian army, which by education, training and commitment was pro-Western, would become a basis for Western influence. Unfortunately, when the political future of Bulgaria was

decided, its Army was engaged in combat elsewhere in Europe, fighting in the last phase of World War II as part of the Allied coalition against Nazi Germany.

Once it was clear that there would be no agreement on the Balkans with the Soviet Union, America concentrated its efforts on the other critical issues of East-West relations. The overriding problems, such as the future of Germany and Japan, were far more central in the increasingly antagonistic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

## **B. DURING THE COLD WAR**

The Cold War landscape in the Balkans was influenced unquestionably by the East-West political struggle. Because of the preoccupation of the American leadership with the threat of Soviet communism, Bulgaria was not one of the top priorities of U.S. security policy between 1949 and 1989. Moreover, Sofia's foreign policy during the Cold War was dominated by the Soviet Union, perhaps even more than were the foreign policies of the other Warsaw Pact members. This surely deterred the United States from taking deliberate steps towards any kind of diplomatic warming of the relations between the two states. The loyalty with which the Bulgarian communist leadership served the Soviet Union for 45 years was appreciated in the Kremlin. Bulgaria's strategic importance was derived from its key location in a region that has always been of great historical significance for Moscow, as well as from its common borders with two NATO members – Greece and Turkey. Bulgaria's status as a Soviet stronghold in the

Balkans was reinforced after the partial defection from Moscow's influence of Yugoslavia, Albania and Romania. These partial defections left Bulgaria as Moscow's only loyal partner in the region, and the United States considered this an important factor which determined the nature of America's limited relationship with Bulgaria.

The era of bipolarity framed U.S. security policy towards Eastern Europe and the Balkans within the limits of the Cold War circumstances. These regions were for the most part in the Soviet sphere of influence, but on the periphery of U.S. security interests. The atmosphere of mutual deterrence reflected a certain strategic balance. Each side had an identifiable enemy and, therefore, a clear picture of "who controls what." The sense of discipline, as well as the sense of the permanence of the status quo, influenced the interactions between the two alliances.

Soviet foreign policy objectives were notorious for their complex character. For some analysts, the Soviet influence in Eastern Europe was undivided from the influence Moscow attempted to exert over Western policy towards the Warsaw Pact countries. There was no contradiction in these two directions of Soviet policy, because these were two interdependent and mutually reinforcing objectives, which actually allowed the USSR to assess the level of Western influence in Eastern Europe. The policy enforcement differed from

"softer" to "harder," depending on the issues and on how important each country was for Soviet priorities.

In the case of Bulgaria, as a result of the changing domestic and international circumstances in the mid-1950's, hopes for greater freedom were encouraged. It was difficult for many Bulgarians to accept the tight Soviet control over the Bulgarian communist leadership, strengthened by Sofia's dependence on the resources it received from the Soviet Union. For Moscow, the primary imperial asset was its control over the links that Bulgaria had with the West. Even the cultural interactions – to say nothing of the political, economic and other activities – had to gain the approval of Moscow and were conducted under the supervision of the Soviet leadership.

According to a prominent U.S. expert,

The Bulgarian relationship therefore was vital to the Soviet Union, and it was a relationship for which the Soviets were prepared to pay.<sup>10</sup>

The relations between the United States and Bulgaria during the Cold War were essentially determined by the U.S.- Soviet (and larger East-West) rivalry for influence throughout the world. Soviet expansionism created conflicts with the United States in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This Soviet-

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, J.F., *The Challenge to Soviet Interests in Eastern Europe: Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia*, N-2498-FF (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, December 1986), p.5.

American (and East-West) competition was determined by economic and ideological factors, among others. In Bulgaria's case, the economic determinants were more significant for the USSR rather than for the United States. A small country with a population of 9 million people was not a big stake for U.S. business interests. At the same time Bulgaria was economically important for Moscow, because Bulgaria's agriculture made an immense contribution to the huge Soviet market. Bulgaria received energy resources and raw materials in return. This historical interdependence has made the current democratic reforms in Bulgaria a hostage of the past, and still continues to influence Sofia's foreign policy.

In general, the United States was willing to pursue relations, but the conditions were not conducive to making the interactions highly productive.

Bulgaria has been both responsive to and aware of the benefits to be derived from improved relations with the West, particularly the industrialized West European states. Generally, Sofia has followed Moscow's lead, but at times Bulgaria has shown a readiness for expanded relations which have not accorded with a particular Soviet strategy.<sup>11</sup>

The West and the United States acknowledged this fact, but it was not enough to pursue active relations in any area. The U.S. security interests in the Balkans were represented significantly in Greece and Turkey, and this was

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.17.



defined by their NATO membership and market economies. The United States was acquainted with the psychological insecurity which Moscow had about its ideological and economic influence in Eastern Europe. In the case of Bulgaria, Moscow's insecurity was especially strong because of the crucial Russian historical experiences and interests in the Balkans. This deterred the United States from undertaking ambitious initiatives toward Bulgaria.

The USSR, however, has viewed Eastern Europe not only as a buffer but also as a springboard in its diplomatic, political and military-related efforts to decouple Western Europe from the United States and to increase Soviet influence...Eastern Europe's promotion of "European détente" with West European states has been encouraged by the USSR to increase West European interest in "peaceful coexistence" with the East that could either pull the United States in the same direction or, alternatively, enhance frictions within the Western alliance.<sup>12</sup>

In short, the United States determined its policy towards Bulgaria on the basis of its implications for the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union. Because Moscow was sensitive over its position in the Balkans and its partnership with communist Bulgaria, for the United States it was important to project a low profile and to conduct cautious interactions with Sofia.

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, A. Ross, *The Impact of Eastern Europe on Soviet Policy Toward Western Europe*, R-3322-AF (Santa Monica. Calif.: RAND Corporation, March 1986), pp.4-5.



### III. U. S. - BULGARIAN SECURITY RELATIONS SINCE 1989

After November 10, 1989, Bulgaria became a parliamentary republic and started a process of reform to a market-oriented democracy. This drastic change in the nature of the state had great implications for the state's structure, especially its security architecture.

The Bulgarian armed forces were introduced to democratic civilian control and started a process of reform, which turned out to be painful and long. During the seven years from 1990 to 1997, the changes in the security establishment were slow, and turned out to be insufficient. Moving away from a large, offensively-oriented military became a serious problem, which created a lot of confusion within the society and resulted in a lack of consensus in the political environment regarding the ways in which it might be solved. In 1998, seven years after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, Bulgaria was maintaining a nominal number of troops comparable to the number maintained during the Warsaw Pact period. At the same time, the armed forces had to be introduced to a new type of brigade/core structure and had to learn how to operate under democratic civilian control.

The challenges in the execution of the military reform were further confused by the fact that there was no national consensus on the priorities in Bulgarian foreign policy. Sofia's leaders were especially challenged by the

question of integration into the Western security institutions. The slow process of formulating a new National Security Strategy and a new National Military Strategy reduced the opportunity for creating a clear direction for the reform. The current security environment, the internal politics, the facts of national demographics and the fiscal constraints created the assumption that Bulgaria should seek its security through participation in international security organizations and arrangements, instead of pursuing its security under the premise of maintaining a large national military posture.

#### **A. ACTION PLAN FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

This fact was clear from the very beginning of the democratic changes within Bulgaria. The lack of political consensus over the priorities and direction of the military reform created a serious vacuum in guidance for the military establishment. For example, Bulgaria became a partner in NATO's Partnership for Peace program in early 1994 and participated in numerous exercises. However, this experience was not enough to achieve interoperability with NATO standards, and it did not provide enough necessary experience of Bulgarian troops operating together with their Western partners.

Those and other differences between rhetoric and actions dissolved when the parliamentary elections in 1997 brought the current government to power. It declared that the integration of Bulgaria within the European Union and NATO was a national strategic goal and took vigorous steps to make up for lost time in

achieving its goals. By executing its ambitious policy of creating a new image of its foreign policy and national security objectives, Bulgaria made a significant jump from being an outsider in the process of integration of the East European countries into the family of democratic states. Bulgaria became an impressive example of achieving dramatic results over a short period of time. That behavior brought new attention from the Western democratic community and stimulated the United States to define more specific and ambitious policies. The United States formulated an "Action Plan for Southeast Europe," which was announced on February 10, 1998, on the occasion of the visit of Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov in Washington, D.C.

The U.S. objectives and interests specified in the "Action Plan for Southeast Europe" are mainly focussed on the consolidation and integration of those states into the European and transatlantic structures. As clearly highlighted in that document, the United States is committed to working with these states to help them achieve the following objectives:

- ◆ Mature democratic political processes, grounded in the rule of law and full respect for civil liberties and human rights, with legislative branches that are accountable to their constituents, independent judiciary systems, and a deepening of civil society.
- ◆ Vibrant market economies with wide-scale privatization and macroeconomic restructuring completed, greatly expanded foreign trade and investment, effective customs and commercial/regulatory regimes, and a widening circle of prosperity for all their citizens.

- ♦ Peaceful relations with all their neighbors through the resolution of border and other disputes and development of regional confidence building measures.
- ♦ The conditions for full integration into Euro-Atlantic political, economic, and security institutions.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the Action Plan for Southeast Europe, the Clinton Administration has engaged itself for the first time with a concrete focus on the developing democracies in the southeastern part of Europe – Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Romania, Albania and Slovenia.

Only two of the objectives listed above directly focus on security areas of cooperation. However, one can hypothesize, in view of U.S. foreign policy traditions, that there is no strict line between security and the other objectives. Moreover, the “Action Plan” makes clear that:

These objectives are rooted in our interest in an undivided, peaceful and democratic Europe. As part of this effort, we seek to maintain the stability of those countries that form a geographic ring around the core of Balkan conflict. Their stability and prosperity will reinforce implementation of the Dayton Accords and help assure that they and other friends and Allies in the region do not become embroiled in a widening circle of conflict.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Action Plan for Southeast Europe*, announced on February 10, 1998, on the occasion of the visit of Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov in Washington, D.C., p.1

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

**B. JOINT STATEMENT ON "U.S.-BULGARIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA"**

Security is a key word in the current U.S. foreign policy agenda. This means, on the one hand, investment in security assets, including military forces, and on the other hand, security for investments (stable and predictable economic and political relations). An analysis of the statement above would suggest that the U.S. interests in the region are not only driven by economic and other considerations, but are also deeply rooted in the American strategic culture's desire to promote and preserve democratic values abroad.

The diplomatic rhetoric of the Joint Statement entitled "U.S.-Bulgarian Partnership for a New Era" released on February 10, 1998, as a reflection of the Action Plan for Southeast Europe, explains the reasoning behind the support which Bulgaria got for its reforms and its interest in becoming a part of the democratic security institutions. The United States interests in the region are comparable to those in other parts of the world. Consequently, the important impact of the democratic development in Bulgaria after 10 years of reforms makes the interests of the two countries compatible and creates a basis for constructive cooperation.

According to the "Action Plan":

Strengthened ties between the United States and the countries in the region will promote other common interests including: expansion of mutual trade and investment; development of multiple routes for energy from the Caspian Basin; countering threats posed by organized crime, the illicit transfer of sensitive weapons and technologies, and environmental degradation.<sup>15</sup>

The State Department's report describes the interests behind the new support for Bulgaria. One of the reasons why Bulgaria is important to the United States is its location on the strategic route of oil and gas; it is indispensable to the development of the resources from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Bulgaria's strategic importance stems from its location as well as from the fact that it is a zone of stability in a turbulent part of the world where oil and gas are major factors. This position of the U.S. government is compatible with the Bulgarian interest in finding alternative energy resources.

More important from the Bulgarian perspective is the U.S. support for the economic and institutional reforms now taking place in Bulgaria, because of the difficult character of the transformational processes. The more focussed and engaged the U.S. policy towards Bulgaria is, the more valuable it is as an influence, because of the impact it could have in helping to avoid destabilizing errors in domestic policy. The American leadership has understood the

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<sup>15</sup> *Action Plan for Southeast Europe*, announced on February 10, 1998, on the occasion of the visit of Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov in Washington, D.C., p.1



importance of such a clear engagement, and since February 1998 Washington has been pursuing a determined and constructive policy towards Bulgaria.

The positive change in Bulgarian foreign policy resides in Sofia's decision to play an active and important role in pursuing its determination to become a part of the Western security institutions. By building a new image as a reliable and steady partner, Bulgaria caught the attention of the U.S. leadership and convinced Washington of its capabilities to play a stabilizing role in the Balkan and Black Sea regions. The important message from the Bulgarian government is that Sofia's security agenda is a long term one, and thus is compatible with United States security policy. The new realities have brought about new types of relations between the two countries.

Accordingly, the Action Plan for Southeast Europe not only defines the framework of the new mutual interests and objectives, but also sets up three concrete tracks for their pursuit. Track I describes the measures through which political, economic, military and civic reform is to be promoted in Southeast Europe. The security implications of that track are declared to be:

- ◆ On military front, work to increase Warsaw Initiative funding for SEE [Southeast Europe] in FY99, FY 2000 and beyond. Continue trend of expanding IMET [International Military Education and Training] funding...
- ◆ Support reform in intelligence and security services...

- ◆ Maintain annual Bilateral Working Group meetings on defense matters.<sup>16</sup>

The objectives of the U.S. government and the commitment of Bulgaria to fulfil its part of the Action Plan have resulted in concrete projects and measures in the security areas, including enhanced cooperation in political-military affairs.

- ◆ On the military front, the Department of Defense has developed a number of programs to support the reform of the Bulgarian military along Western lines, including for this year
- ◆ A \$900,000 International Military Education and Training program that has eleven Bulgarian cadets studying at U.S. military academies;
- ◆ A \$3.2 million dollar Foreign Military Financing program; and,
- ◆ A military liaison team resident in the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense to organize staff and information exchanges.<sup>17</sup>

### C. U.S. -BULGARIAN TASK FORCE

There are reasonable explanations for U.S.- Bulgarian cooperation in the security area, and recent study efforts have clarified them. In October 1998, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., a U.S.- Bulgarian Task Force was created. Its main purpose is declared to be assisting

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<sup>16</sup> *Action Plan for Southeast Europe*, announced on February 10, 1998, on the occasion of the visit of Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov in Washington, D.C., pp. 4 and 5

<sup>17</sup> *Joint Statement on "U.S. - Bulgarian Partnership for a New Era,"* released in February 10, 1998, p.2.

Bulgaria in realizing its emerging role as a generator of stability and security in the Balkans. In a presentation at a meeting of the Task Force, the Bulgarian Ambassador in Washington, Philip Dimitrov, was reported to make some key points, one of which is particularly relevant to this thesis.

Despite of the positive results achieved, slow progress has been registered in implementing military reforms in Bulgaria. Dimitrov agreed with a recent analysis by Jeff Simon from the U.S. National Defense University entitled "Bulgaria - Seven Lost Years." Simon's assessment proved useful for the Bulgarian government, which has now made a concerted effort to overcome the problems associated with restructuring the armed forces and reforming civil-military relations. Bulgarian Prime Minister Ivan Kostov recently declared that he would personally supervise the Ministry of Defense in order to better implement military reform.<sup>18</sup>

What is the significance of this statement? Why is it important to assess the U.S. perspective on security matters in Bulgaria?

During the period between 1990 and 1997, most of the East European countries, especially those in Central Europe, had a very consistent policy of engaging in all aspects of cooperation with the West. Bulgaria started its reforms with passion and determination, but all the difficulties experienced on the road of social and economic reforms led to a transfer of power into the hands of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in 1994 and thus to a change in security objectives and orientation. The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the associated economic sanctions on Yugoslavia (which Bulgaria helped to enforce) created additional

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<sup>18</sup> U.S.- *Bulgarian Task Force*, Preliminary Report, February 1999, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.

difficulties for the struggling economies of the emerging democracies in Southeast Europe.

However, the economic crises in 1996 brought back to power the Union of Democratic Forces. In the general elections in April 1997, a second generation of reformers came to power with the goal of making up for lost time in reforms. They clearly informed American decision-makers that there was a will and an opportunity to develop constructive bilateral relations. The Bulgarian government had to make up for lost time and opportunities in communicating the message that Bulgaria had become a stable democracy. At the same time, Bulgaria wished to declare clearly that its main interests included becoming part of the democratic family of states which shared common security and defense interests.

Regarded as a failing student during the previous years, Bulgaria recently made a significant turnaround after years of stagnation and initiated dramatic reforms. In July 1997, with the help of International Monetary Fund, a currency board was introduced to Bulgaria; and this pushed down the inflation rate, reduced the budget deficit, and substantially raised foreign investment. The economic improvements and the new government's commitments to a free market economy created a new type of interest from the West, including an interest relevant to Bulgaria's desire to prove that it was a serious candidate for membership in NATO, the EU and the WEU.

**D. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT CHALLENGES OF THE U.S.  
SECURITY AGENDA FOR SOUTHEAST EUROPE**

Although Bulgaria joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in early 1994, and participated in a number of PfP exercises, it was not until February 1997 that Sofia pursued an intensified dialogue with NATO and adopted a determined policy to seek Alliance membership. Bulgaria was not invited to join NATO at the Alliance's July 1997 Madrid Summit, unlike Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The Bulgarian government pursued its declared intentions, however, and strongly pressed the Alliance not to close the door to other candidates.

During the last two years, the growing contribution of Sofia to the fulfillment of NATO's objectives has created a new attitude towards Bulgaria within the Alliance; and this has been especially acknowledged by the American leadership. Bulgaria's determination to be an anchor of stability in the Balkans led to an enhanced interest and active partnership, in the context of NATO's role as a guarantor of security in the Balkans. The dynamic behavior of Bulgaria in proposing several regional initiatives, with the aim of maintaining a balanced regional foreign policy through mediation and the pursuit of diplomatic solutions, drew the attention of the United States and its allies in NATO. For the last two years, Bulgaria has proved to be a serious and reliable partner in the Balkans.

That behavior evoked a new attitude from the U.S. leadership. As a part of Track II of the U.S. Action Plan for Southeast Europe, announced on February 10, 1998, the United States declared that it is in America's interests to promote greater regional cooperation in Southeast Europe. The implications of implementing those intentions in security policy led to the active role which Bulgaria plays in the region.

In an effort to breakdown barriers and encourage regional cooperation, the United States and Bulgaria, together with several other stable democracies, are engaged in a number of cooperative efforts such as the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, the South Balkan Development Initiative and the annual Southeastern European Defense Ministerial.<sup>19</sup>

These initiatives and the active role which the United States plays in them underscore the extent to which the U.S. government is seriously involved in the region. As it is stated at the end of the Joint Statement entitled "U.S. - Bulgarian Partnership for a New Era," "These bilateral and multilateral initiatives will advance our shared goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace."<sup>20</sup>

For Bulgaria, the new security objectives and opportunities, which U.S. involvement in the region creates, are recognized as a serious signal that Sofia has a noteworthy place on the U.S. security agenda. However, there are two

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<sup>19</sup> *Joint Statement U.S. - Bulgarian Partnership for a New Era*, released in February 10, 1998, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

important considerations which have resulted from the current events in the Balkans and the process of NATO enlargement. For Sofia the lack of a clear statement at the April 1999 NATO summit on the acceptance of specific new members brought some disappointment. Because it had made NATO membership its foreign policy priority and had announced it as a base for its domestic agenda (and, not incidentally, as a goal to explain and justify the painful reform in the armed forces), the Bulgarian government could face difficult times in domestic politics, including criticism in some quarters.

The other side of the story is, however, a reflection of the new challenges which NATO faces in the process of accepting new members. Without promising specific additions, the Alliance is not excluding a second post-Cold War round of enlargement. NATO holds that the door remains open, as per Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Alliance's leaders, and especially the United States policy-makers, have a clear understanding that most of the East European countries which are aiming at NATO and WEU membership are referring to these potential memberships as an opportunity to gain Western financial support. The end of the Cold War differs from the end of the Second World War, however. The world has changed its key players and the rules of the game are different, at least in some respects. States nonetheless often behave as rational players, in terms of their perceptions of interests and the lessons they derive

from their national historical experiences; and this fact should be assessed over time when any nation's interests are analyzed.

The United States determines its interests on the basis of its global responsibilities and always keeps in mind the implications for its domestic agenda. The notion that NATO membership for Bulgaria should be achieved "now or never" simply risks conveying the wrong message. Such an incorrect message could have negative implications for the domestic scene in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government has had a difficult battle to fight on a couple of fronts. By pursuing a vigorous foreign policy and acting as a NATO partner, even though not yet invited to join the Alliance, Bulgaria should be confident that the investment which NATO Allies, and specifically the United States, are making through different programs and projects are not in vain. Moreover, the U.S. commitment to providing resources and attention suggests an intention to establish a long term partnership, so that the Bulgarian leadership should be confident that the support and aid Sofia receives stand as a serious statement of U.S. intentions about even closer relations in the future.

The recent events in Yugoslavia and NATO's air strikes against the Belgrade government since March 1999 have created a different framework for U.S.-Bulgarian security relations. The consequences are consistent with the saying "Life is what happens while you are making other plans." Bulgaria and the United States were forced to speed up and deepen even further their strategic



partnership when the conflict between NATO and Yugoslavia started. Initially, it was hoped that the Kosovo crisis could be decided quickly and effectively through air strikes before the Washington Summit in April 1999. The Bulgarian government was determined to continue investing time, effort and attention in the strategic relationship with the United States. As a result of its strategic location and previously declared commitment to support NATO operations in the Balkans, Bulgaria's strategic importance emerged with its status as a critical frontline state. The diplomatic and political exchanges of information and the bilateral activities in the period since March 1999 would have been inconceivable even days before the decision on 23 March to conduct air strikes against Yugoslavia.

The turmoil which the NATO-Yugoslav conflict over Kosovo has brought to the region cannot yet be assessed comprehensively because no one knows when and how it will end. Like several other nations concerned, Bulgaria has the burden of being a "front-line state." NATO bombing of the bridges on the river Danube has cut Bulgarian trade with West Europe and economic interactions with Balkan neighbors.

According to a prominent American analyst of European politics,

What does worry the Bulgarian government is the economic fallout from Kosovo. In an interview in Sofia shortly before the start of NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, Prime Minister Kostov noted the risk of Bulgarian "isolation from Europe" should the hostilities escalate and nervous Westerners withdraw investments. "The Europeans would have to look through the fire of a possible war in Kosovo in order to see us," he worried.<sup>21</sup>

Those concerns, however, became a serious challenge for Bulgaria after the NATO air strikes in Kosovo and the rest of Yugoslavia began. During the Washington Summit in April 1999, the meeting between the heads of states and government of NATO and the leaders of the countries in the region of Yugoslavia resulted in a Chairmen's Summary of seven points, which aimed to communicate an understanding of the difficulties that the front-line states face. According to this summary,

NATO Heads of State and Government expressed their gratitude for the efforts and solidarity shown by the neighboring states in support of the Alliance's and the international community's objectives. In this context, they reaffirmed that the security of the neighboring states was of direct and material concern to Alliance member states and that NATO would respond to any challenges by Belgrade to the neighboring states resulting from the presence of NATO forces and their activities on their territory during this crisis.<sup>22</sup>

The commitment which NATO and the United States expressed with this statement could be explained not only by the involvement in a conflict that

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<sup>21</sup> Pond, Elizabeth, "Can Bulgaria Beat the Balkan Curse?" *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Chairman's Summary, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government with Countries in the Region of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, NATO Summit Press Release, 25 April 1999, point #5.

presented serious implications for the region. It also derived from "the need for developing a longer term comprehensive strategy with the help of different institutions for securing stability and prosperity based on democratic principles and enhanced economic and political development."<sup>23</sup>

The United States understood the problem that the Sofia government faced with public support after NATO's conflict with Yugoslavia started in March 1999 and after the NATO Summit in Washington in April 1999, when invitations for a second post-Cold War round of NATO enlargement were not extended. The U.S. leadership and the rest of the Allies intended to design a program for those states determined to become a part of the Western security community. However, for all "front-line states," and especially for Bulgaria, it has been clear that this region is on the US security agenda and that it is a US national interest to keep the area peaceful, with stable democratic states and prosperous market economies. The Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Ivan Kostov, has been reported as saying: "Support for the alliance now is 'a question of Euro-Atlantic Solidarity, and choosing European values'...A failure by NATO in Kosovo, he added, would 'give the right to any government to commit genocide against its people.'"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, point # 6.

<sup>24</sup> Tagliabue, John, "Bulgarians Bet Future On A Link To NATO," New York Times, May 12, 1999.

The dynamic process of creating new security relations between the United States and Bulgaria should be assessed, especially in the context of the current crises in the Balkans, on two levels: first, addressing the current security challenges, and second, drawing a picture of the underlying long-term conditions for developing effective partnership and alliance.

The short-term security interactions between the United States and Bulgaria are focused on bringing about a successful settlement of the Kosovo crisis. Bulgaria plays an important role with its support for the U.S. and NATO security agenda for the region. The new "Marshall" plan for the Balkans is still on the drawing board; the United States and its allies are still determining their priorities for this plan's execution. Consequently, these political and economic steps for rebuilding the region require the active participation of the West Europeans within the institutional framework of the European Union. Most political analysts agree that the United States will support an active and effective EU policy for reconstruction and development in the Balkans. This does not exclude the leading role of the United States. On the contrary, its role should be significant but still not too "overbearing," mainly because of America's lack of tradition in understanding the way in which Europeans solve ethnic and minority problems. The United States has a tradition of supporting the rights of ethnic minorities on the basis of protecting individual rights. This stems from the history and civic traditions of the United States. In contrast, Western Europe,

including the European Union, has accumulated more experience in the legal protection of collective minority rights. This does not eliminate the tensions between ethnic groups, but it at least gives hope and facilitates solving some of the problems in the Balkans. Bulgaria is a good example of a stable transitional democracy with a diverse ethnic map. It is in the interests of the United States to promote and support the success of the reforms in Bulgaria, so that it will become an advanced democracy.

The long-term implications for United States foreign policy towards Bulgaria will be significantly dependent on domestic conditions in both countries. The U.S. Presidential election in 2000 and subsequent changes in the executive establishment will probably result in some change in foreign policy approaches, but not in America's general attitude.

What type of political and economic structure Bulgaria will have in the future is in a sense an even more significant question. If the reforms continue as anticipated, it is quite possible that Bulgaria will become an important partner and potential ally of the United States in Western security institutions. The extensive relations with the United States in the future will stem from successful improvement in economic well-being, liberal political institutions, and the transformation of the professional military, so that it is capable of meeting the

security challenges of the new millennium. A "broader strategy for the region"<sup>25</sup> will include transformations "based upon democracy, justice, economic integration and security cooperation."<sup>26</sup>

These last phrases sound like a public relations agenda and an expression of hope and good will when addressed to a historically troubled region such as the Balkans. But assessed from the point of view of American foreign policy traditions and strategic culture, these phrases should be understood as a commitment and a declaration of United States interests in this part of the world. The peoples and governments in Southeast Europe should consider this a strong signal of positive U.S. intentions. This should encourage the West to decide what actions need to be taken to advance its security and other objectives.

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<sup>25</sup> Term, used in point #7 of *Chairman's Summary, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government with Countries in the Region of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, NATO Summit Press Release, 25 April 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. point #6.

#### IV. COMPARISON OF THE TWO PERIODS – PRIOR AND SINCE 1989

The history of American security policy concerning Bulgaria prior to and during World War II, as well as during the Cold War, was marked by the identification of basic American political goals while balancing between the interests of two great European powers – Great Britain and Russia (later the Soviet Union).

Prior to World War II the United States had formal diplomatic and commercial relations with Bulgaria, but their nature was mainly determined by the status which Bulgaria occupied in the national interests of Russia (later the Soviet Union), Turkey, Germany, France and Great Britain. To state that Bulgaria as an independent state from 1878 to 1939 played a role on the United States security agenda would be historically correct, but it would overstate Bulgaria's significance for Washington.

On the eve of World War II, Bulgaria was often considered to be one of the keys to the Balkans. Because of its defeat in World War I, as an ally of Germany, it had a very difficult fate in the interwar period, which was marked by military coups, political assassinations, and a foreign policy and trade pattern dependent on Great Power politics and interests. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, some Great Powers were eager to offer a deal for certain commitments by the Bulgarian political leadership, because they were tempted

by Bulgaria's strategic location, as well as by its large and well-respected army. One of those great powers was the United States.

The first American attempt to gain Bulgarian involvement on the side of the Allies came in 1941, as a result of a specific request from London. Pressed by Berlin to honor its commitments to Germany, Bulgaria declared war on the United States and Great Britain, a decision forced by the rapid development of events after Pearl Harbor. Washington was clearly aware of the nature of the Bulgarian choice, and delayed its own declaration of war on Bulgaria until June 1942. In the spring of 1943, while Washington and London started considering opening a second front in Europe, Bulgaria was back into the diplomatic scene as a potential partner worthy of attention. At the end of August 1944, the fate of Bulgaria was almost predetermined by the Red Army's rapid advance to the southeast and its arrival at the river Danube, near the Bulgarian frontier with Romania.

America's central goal for Bulgaria before its surrender in September 1944 was the creation of a democratic government that would bring the country back to the mainstream of postwar international life. America's essential security interests were to promote the emergence of pro-Western governments in the Balkans that would pursue economic prosperity and democracy.

Some of the arguments defending the American diplomatic and political elite for their "non-policy" approach towards Bulgaria in 1944-1949 refer to the



lack of U.S. military assets in the Balkan region. The "loss" of Bulgaria from the democratic community derived from the events that forced Washington to make a pragmatic calculation about American strategic interests and capabilities in Europe. There were no U.S. troops on the ground in Bulgaria, and hence no means to enforce any American policy decisions, if necessary. Moreover, this is a reasonable explanation for the concentration of U.S. military forces in Germany, Italy and elsewhere in West Europe, in preference to the Balkans. The decision to concentrate American efforts and troops in Western Europe was well-founded, in view of U.S. strategic objectives and interests, as well as the available military assets and the priorities derived from American domestic politics.

The Cold War landscape in the Balkans was influenced unquestionably by the East-West political struggle. Because of the preoccupation of the American leadership with the threat of Soviet communism, Bulgaria was not one of the top priorities of U.S. security policy between 1949 and 1989. Moreover, Sofia's foreign policy during the Cold War was dominated by the Soviet Union, perhaps even more than were the foreign policies of the other Warsaw Pact members. This surely deterred the United States from taking deliberate steps towards any kind of diplomatic warming of the relations between the two states. The loyalty with which the Bulgarian communist leadership served the Soviet Union for 45 years was appreciated in Kremlin. Bulgaria's strategic importance was derived from its key location in a region that has always been of great historical

significance for Moscow, as well as from its common borders with two NATO members – Greece and Turkey. Bulgaria's status as a Soviet stronghold in the Balkans was reinforced after the partial defection from Moscow's influence of Yugoslavia, Albania and Romania. These partial defections left Bulgaria as Moscow's only loyal partner in the region, and the United States considered this an important factor which determined the nature of America's limited relationship with Bulgaria.

The era of bipolarity framed U.S. security policy towards Eastern Europe and the Balkans within the limits of the Cold War circumstances. These regions were for the most part in the Soviet sphere of influence, but on the periphery of U.S. security interests. The atmosphere of mutual deterrence reflected a certain strategic balance. Each side had an identifiable enemy and, therefore, a clear picture of "who controls what." The sense of discipline, as well as the sense of the permanence of the status quo, influenced the interactions between the two alliances.

The end of the Cold War in 1989 was a long-anticipated and widely desired event, but ten years after this historic development, some analyses of its aftermath suggest that neither the NATO nor the Warsaw Pact countries were prepared for the events that followed. The peoples of East Europe believed that after communism had gone they should imitate the developed capitalist economies. In the case of Bulgaria, after years of reforms and wondering what

might be the best way to achieve democracy and prosperity, it became clear that the road to success would be long and that it would involve sacrifices. Yet, the West was also unprepared to deal with the new challenges of the emerging democracies. The communist threat was gone, but historically-determined emotions and sensitivities, weak civic cultures and traditions, as well as ruined economies, threatened hopes for a quick recovery of the ex-communist states and their entrance into the community of the prosperous and democratic states. In the case of the Balkans, it was clear that these diversities would challenge the U.S. security posture. The region showed how difficult it can be to produce healthy democracies in this area, which is located between regions vital for United States interests – Western Europe and the Middle East.

However, when the conflict in Yugoslavia broke out at the beginning of the 1990's, the Balkans were not a serious challenge for U.S. interests. Three Central European states (Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia), German unification, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union were central for U.S. concerns and attention in Europe. Articulations of U.S. security policy at that time suggest that the United States was primarily concerned with fulfilling its new role as the world's only superpower. This resulted in a vacuum in policymaking, the consequences of which we have to deal with at the end of this century. The circumstances in the Balkans suggest that small miscalculations in

formulating and implementing foreign policy and strategy may create serious troubles.

The Balkans have a long tradition of being peripheral to great power interests, but are nonetheless known for providing opportunities to start serious conflicts (for instance, the twentieth century's Thirty Years War – a collective noun, used sometimes to describe the period between 1914 and 1945). Peripheral interests generally do not require extensive commitments. The United States, with its well-developed security architecture in Europe based on NATO, did not need to pursue unilateral U.S. involvement. The formulation of these interests, however, sometimes demands not only their identification, but also an assessment of priorities.

Promoting democracy and creating conditions for developing free market economies were among the declared interests and intentions of U.S. foreign policy. This ideal, however, is not new for the United States. The moral premise under which American pragmatism has flourished includes the Wilsonian dream: "The world must be made safe for democracy."<sup>27</sup>

The failure of the United States after the Second World War to put Bulgaria in the Western orbit left Washington with little, if any, influence in the region. This led to a lack of understanding of Bulgarian political culture and

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<sup>27</sup> Woodrow Wilson quoted in Bemis, Samuel Flagg, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, fifth edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, September, 1965, p.615

traditions, as well as an inability to influence the processes of reform and transition in Southeast Europe. The lack of American influence and information, as well as the unstable nature of the changes in Bulgaria, meant that U.S. investors took little interest in Bulgaria. Moreover, the problems in the former Yugoslavia created additional obstacles to business relationships and interactions.

Bulgarian President Petar Stoyanov, who seeks to bring his country into the alliance.... blamed Milosevic for a decade of war in the Balkans that has crippled economic development throughout the region. "This has been a disaster for the Balkans for eight years now," Stoyanov said in an interview. "Due to Milosevic, my country was destabilized long ago."<sup>28</sup>

This statement describes the message which the United States received from the Balkans: in an unstable region security concerns dominate the political and economic climate. That is why security is such an important consideration for U.S. interests in Southeast Europe: the liberal democracies and market economies could not be promoted and protected if the environment remained unstable. In the case of Bulgaria, the conflict next door certainly was a contributing factor in bringing about United States activism in promoting stability. The limited U.S. economic aid at the beginning of the 1990's was crucial for the shaky economies in the region. Bulgaria's losses in maintaining economic

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<sup>28</sup> Drozdiak, William and Lippman, Thomas W., "NATO Summit Ends With a Restoration Vow," *Washington Post*, April 26, 1999.

sanctions against Iraq and Yugoslavia were critical for the political and economic transition. The state became vulnerable and unable to continue reforms. This brought additional instability and criminalization of the region, which provoked an insecure domestic environment (corruption, organized crime, etc.). That is why it is of great significance for Bulgaria, if Washington understands that America's foreign economic policy needs objectives that recognize goals more precise than the hope for creating stable market economies. The new initiatives to help the recovery of the region after the end of the NATO-Yugoslav conflict regarding Kosovo should not be pursued in the form solely of loans and marginal economic aid. Bulgaria needs foreign investment and its private business sector needs an opportunity to compete in the world markets. This will create a foundation for rapid recovery and successful reforms. It is in U.S. interests to support the efforts of Bulgarian society and to create a security environment for a democratic and prosperous Bulgaria.

In general, the concept of foreign policymaking is determined by principles and notions such as the national interest, outcomes, outputs, strategy, objectives, influence, and the ability to project power. The United States is in a unique position as the only superpower in the world, with all the assets and capabilities necessary for this role. Yet, the new environment suggests that Washington may have to choose between (a) a direct involvement in the Balkan arena, attempting to influence forcibly the outcome of events, and (b) a more

passive strategy, mainly sharing responsibilities in the region with its European allies. This decision will allow the United States to define the parameters of its policy in the Balkans by determining whether it is going to be an active or passive foreign policy in relation to the national interest. U.S. influence in the region will increase to the extent that efforts and investments are made. The need for concentrated effort derives from the character of the influence which the United States has in Europe. NATO as an institution should play an increasingly significant role as it redefines its purposes and functions.

The efforts made by the Bulgarian government to join NATO do not just represent a desire to buy an effective insurance policy for the future. It is also in U.S. security interests to support Bulgaria as it reforms its military and security institutions. This will allow Bulgaria to join the Euro-Atlantic family of democratic states.





## V. CONCLUSION

American security policy objectives and interests in the Balkans have changed significantly throughout the period of America's rise as a world power. In the last hundred years, the Balkans have moved from a position in which the United States maintained formal diplomatic relations without serious security commitments to constituting an arena of major U.S. engagement.

Prior to World War II, the Balkans were considered a sphere of European great power influence, and this is probably one of the reasons for American noninvolvement in this region. However, the aftermath of the Second World War and the reduction in the British engagement in the Mediterranean were among the major factors to determine the more focussed U.S. policy in the Balkans during the Cold War.

The involvement of the United States in the Balkans during the Cold War reflected America's efforts to counter the Soviet Union's aggressive policy of pursuing and maintaining well-controlled spheres of influence around the world. The main U.S. interest in the Balkans, including in Bulgaria, was to maintain that region's stability and security, so that conflicts there do not affect U.S. interests in Western Europe and the Middle East. The main goal of United States policy in the Balkans during the Cold War was to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence and to preserve the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Bulgaria's strong dependence on Moscow and the lack of any particular reasons

for special U.S. attention discouraged Washington from pursuing deeper involvement in Bulgaria.

Recent U.S. policy in the Balkans, and especially toward Bulgaria, changed its premises with the upheaval in the strategic context at the end of the Cold War. Security became an important consideration for U.S. interests in Southeast Europe. The main reason for this resides in the fact that liberal democracies and market economies can not be preserved and protected if the security environment is unstable. In the case of Bulgaria, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia certainly was a contributing factor in leading America to pursue an active policy to ensure its stability. The limited U.S. economic aid at the beginning of the 1990's was crucial for the reforming economies in the region. Bulgaria's losses in maintaining economic sanctions against Iraq and Yugoslavia were critical during its political and economic transition.

That is why it is of great significance for Bulgaria, if Washington understands that America's foreign economic policy needs objectives more precise than hope for creating stable market economies. The new initiatives to help the recovery of the region after the end of the NATO-Yugoslav conflict regarding Kosovo should not be pursued in the form solely of loans and marginal economic aid. Bulgaria needs foreign investments and its private business sector needs an opportunity to compete in world markets. This will create a foundation for rapid recovery and successful reforms. It is in U.S.

interests to support the efforts of Bulgarian society and to promote the establishment of a security environment for a democratic and prosperous Bulgaria.

If the implementation of reforms in Bulgaria continues and they achieve the anticipated results, it is quite possible that this new democracy and market economy could become an important partner and therefore ultimately an ally of the United States in Western security institutions. Bulgaria's extensive relations with the United States in the future will stem from a successful improvement in its economic well-being, the strengthening of its liberal political establishment, and the transformation of its professional military, so that it is capable of meeting the security challenges of the new millennium. Therefore the most important determinant of U.S. security interests in Bulgaria now and in the future will be Bulgaria itself.



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